Tips
for Writing
Grant Proposals

INTRODUCTION

There is no magic formula for writing a successful grant proposal. However, there are steps you can take to make your application stand out and increase your chances of receiving assistance. This handbook offers practical tips for community organizations and local governments as they seek help with community economic development projects.

Many grant writers mistakenly believe their biggest challenge is to craft the words to convince a funder to give them money for their programs. While it is crucial to present a compelling story, it is just as important to spend time developing a well thought-out and logical proposal. Funders want to see up front that you will succeed in meeting your goals.

As you read each section of this guide, keep in mind you probably will not have a successful application if your project is not well developed. This includes broad community and stakeholder participation, prioritizing needs, identifying reasonable goals and objectives, and determining measurable results of the project.

After developing the project, take time to find the right funding source. While it may be tempting to send an executive summary to every foundation even remotely involved in funding similar projects, a "shotgun approach" is rarely successful.

When you've developed your project and identified funding sources that best match your goals, you are ready to begin writing.

Good luck!   *Eileen Ackerman*   *Lisa Cohen*

MYTHS OF GRANT WRITING

Grants are free money.

A good grant writer knows how to create an illusion.

The best way to get money is to apply everywhere.

A grant will save our organization.

ORGANIZING TO WORK

Grantwriting requires pre-planning. It's a mistake to try to write an application the night before the deadline. Successful grantwriting is not a solo act. Consider forming a committee to work on project development as a group. Funders look for meaningful participation by all parties — indicate specific support in the community.

Before seeking grant funding to support a project, think about the following questions:
- What are your needs?
- What are your resources?
- What part of your needs can be met locally?
- What part of your needs require "outside" funding?
- Is a grant the best way to get funding?

Potential funders expect you to request funding only for needs which cannot be met locally. Therefore, it is up to you to assess those needs and to explain why "outside" funding is necessary.

Putting together a timeline
- Involve prospective beneficiaries.
- Form a committee to share research and to read application instructions.
- Devise a schedule, starting with the due date and working backwards.
- Set a date to complete any revisions.
- Provide time to copy and mail the final product.
- Determine an early deadline to assemble all required information.
- Establish a date for each group meeting.
- Add any other relevant dates; i.e., areas which will require lengthy processes such as surveys, board actions, or public meetings.
- Assign tasks, such as gathering data.
- Choose a coordinator to ensure that all the tasks are completed and the application is submitted by the due date.

Building a common understanding of the project
Develop a shared vision/goal for your project based on local needs. While it may be tempting, avoid changing your vision based on the availability of money.

Informing and involving the public
When you involve the community in your project, you may find expertise that you didn't know existed. Add those people to the team. Building community support and ownership will help ensure a successful project. It also prevents duplication of efforts.

FINDING THE RIGHT FUNDING SOURCE

Prior to applying for any funding, you need to do your homework. One of the first steps is to identify potential funding sources. Your local library should have resource guides and key information on public and private funders. The Internet is another good way to research funding sources.

Who are the funders?

- *Corporate Foundations* usually establish specific funding priorities.
- *General Foundations* or *Community Foundations* may emphasize personal contact and long-term relationships. Their purpose is usually to fulfill a will or trust.
- *Government Grants* usually have narrowly focused guidelines.

What do funders want?

Funders often make resources available to help you better understand their goals. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

- Read all instructions thoroughly and carefully.
- Find out about the philosophy, intentions, and criteria of the funder.
- Take advantage of technical assistance offered through telephone calls, meetings, or workshops.
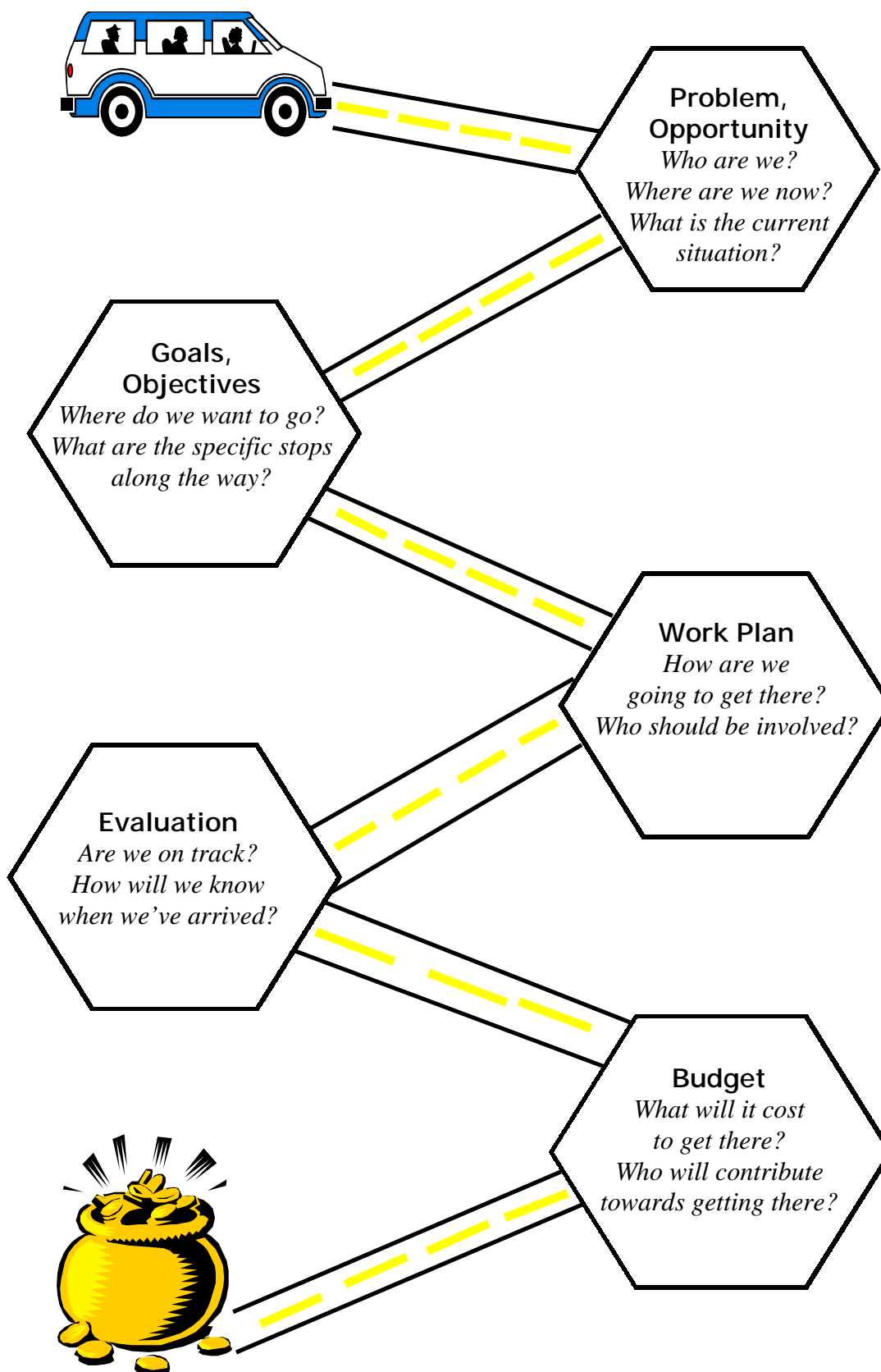- Review past successful applications or talk with past recipients.

To apply or not to apply?

Once your basic research is done, you still need to consider several issues before applying:

- Does your project match the funder's mission?
- Does the funder make grants in your geographic area?
- Is the amount you are requesting within the funder's grant range?
- Does the funder have any policy prohibiting grants for the type of assistance you are requesting?
- Will the funder make grants to cover full costs of a project or do they favor shared cost projects?
- What types of organizations does the funder typically support?
- Does the funder have specific application due dates and proce-dures, or do they review proposals on an on-going basis?

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS
Grantwriting is like planning a road trip.

Problem, Opportunity
Who are we?
Where are we now?
What is the current situation?

Goals, Objectives
Where do we want to go?
What are the specific stops along the way?

Work Plan
How are we going to get there?
Who should be involved?

Evaluation
Are we on track?
How will we know when we've arrived?

Budget
What will it cost to get there?
Who will contribute towards getting there?

BASIC ELEMENTS OF A PROPOSAL

When planning your "road trip" there are specific questions that need to be answered to ensure you arrive at your destination. The following information is generally needed for all grant proposals.

Who are we? Where are we now? What is the current situation?

Opportunity/Problem/Needs

This part of a proposal provides an opportunity to describe the general conditions that your organization desires to change or create. It also sets a context for formulating goals and objectives. This is your chance to convince the potential funder of your great opportunity or compelling need.

> ### The Noah Principle
> *No more prizes for predicting rain.*
> *Only prizes for building arks.*

Don't assume funders are familiar with what is happening in your community. Back up what you write with relevant data or recount true stories to convince the reader. The funder looks at whether the proposed project is reasonable in relation to the opportunity or need you've identified:

- Narrowly define the issues. Don't try to solve all the problems of the world.
- State the issues in terms of "client" needs, not "applicant" needs.
- Make a compelling case. Is the problem severe or urgent? Why is this important? How did your community decide this was a priority?
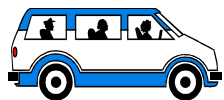
Where do we want to go? What are the specific stops along the way?

Goals and Objectives

These terms are often confusing. However, in general they describe the desired outcomes.

Goal statements express in broad terms what you want to achieve or the desired results. They are necessary and compelling, but often difficult to measure. **Objectives** are challenging to write because they need to be specific. Objectives are measurable and quantifiable components of the goal.

When writing goals and objectives:
- Remember objectives are outcomes, not methods.
- Describe the "client" population that will benefit.
- Give a timeframe in which the objectives will be accomplished.
- Make them measurable, when possible.

Work Plan

This section explains how the stated goals and objectives will be accomplished. It tells the funder if your plan is well thought-out, organized, and planned in a logical sequence. This part should flow naturally from the opportunity and related objectives.

To write a logical work plan:
- Clearly describe what you intend to do.
- Explain why these activities are appropriate.
- Describe the sequence of activities in a thorough and logical fashion.
- Describe program staffing. (Who is responsible for what?)
- Present a reasonable scope of activities that can be completed within the time and resources available.
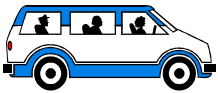
Project Evaluation

The evaluation presents a plan for determining the degree to which objectives are met and methods are followed. It usually describes how the project will be monitored and evaluated. The plan should include checkpoints along the way to help determine if you are achieving your objectives or if activities need to be redirected.

Think about ways to evaluate your project *before* you write the application. Some funders monitor projects to assure they are complying with the terms of the agreement. Some also request and fund an outside evaluation by a third party to determine the success of the project.

When describing the evaluation:
- Present a plan for evaluating the accomplishment of the objectives.
- Present a plan for modifying activities over the course of the project.
- Tell who will be doing the evaluation and why they are best suited to do it.
- Clearly state criteria for success which directly relate to goals and objectives.
- Describe how data will be gathered, and explain any test instruments or questionnaires to be used.
- Describe the process of data analysis.
- Describe any evaluation reports to be produced.

Budget

The budget explains in detail costs to be covered by the funder. It usually describes expenses that will be paid by other parties, including the applicant.

- Tell the same story as the rest of the proposal, but with numbers.
- Be honest with amounts, don't guess.
- Include detail in all areas, including salary and related benefits.
- Do not include any unexplained miscellaneous or contingencies.
- Include all items you are requesting from the funding source.
- Include all items paid by other sources.
- Include the value of all volunteer efforts.
- Include all consultants and how their costs were derived.
- Calculate and describe indirect costs where appropriate and permitted by the funder.
- Assess if this budget is sufficient to perform tasks described in the narrative.
- Do not include activities in your budget that are not described in the work plan.

Funding Contingencies/Future Funding

Most funding sources want to know you have made a good faith effort to find resources in other places, and that the project will continue once initial grant funds have run out.

- What are some other funding sources you have tried? Where else could you get funds for your project?
- Describe how other funds will be obtained, if necessary, to provide a match for the grant.
- If relevant to your project, what is your funding plan for continued operation once grant funds are exhausted?

Other Common Parts of a Project Application

You may be asked to include an executive summary at the beginning of the application. However, it's best to write this part after you've completed the rest of the application. Be prepared to provide background about the requesting organization, especially if it is new. Include a mission statement, by-laws, type of activities usually undertaken, and résumés of key staff. Funders may also ask you to include letters of commitment from other participants and letters of support from other funding sources.

BUILDING YOUR BUDGET

Webster's Dictionary defines "budget" as "an itemized summary of probable expenditures and income for a given period." If you have worked with budgets you know that "probable" is the key word. Accurately estimating costs of items in your budget can save time, money, and many headaches.

The following information describes a "bare-bones" budget for administering a specific project. Keep in mind that labels given to categories of expenditure are not as important as how you determine costs. The terms used here are commonly used for Washington state funding programs.

Project Director:
40 hrs/wk X 52 weeks X
$17/hr = $35,360

Personnel

This refers to the cost of paid staff members who will be working on the project when the applicant organization is the employer and pays social security, income tax, and any other benefits. This does not usually include volunteers or those who are on a contract and do not receive benefits.

Consultant services to
develop and deliver
two 4-month sessions of
entrepreneur training

Personal Services or Subcontracts

This category is used to detail expenses associated with hiring an outside consultant or specialist to perform work associated with the project. It is implied in a personal services contract that the consultant will present you with a total estimated cost of his or her services. These costs often include travel, communication, and reproduction of documents. Those who work on personal services contracts are responsible for their own benefits and taxes.

Long distances
charges/dedicated line/
cell phone

Communication

Communication costs include local telephone service charges if the line is used only for the project, and any related long distance charges. This could also include overnight mail, fax fees, and any other postage costs.

1,000 copies X 4
issues X 7¢ = $280.

Printing and Reproduction

This usually includes costs associated with producing reports, maps, or technical drawings. If you use your own copy machine, you can estimate the cost per page based on a lease-purchase or maintenance agreement.

Copy machine lease
at $175/month X 12
months = $2,100.

Rentals and Leases

This can apply to both office space and equipment. If you rent office equipment for just the duration of the project, it is not usually considered a capital expense.

2 registrations for Downtown Institute X $350 = $700 ➡

Other Goods and Services

Occasionally you will attend a workshop that falls within the scope of your project. This is one example of "Other Goods and Services." Another could be the fee charged by an aerial photo service for flying time. This category has a wide range of purposes and should be discussed with the funder to be sure your expenses are eligible. *Caution*: Don't succumb to the temptation to "pad" this category to get extra money.

Disks, printer cartridges, paper = $400 ➡

Materials and Supplies

Includes any items that are used specifically for the project (paper, pens, film, etc.) Be realistic about what it will take to complete the project.

Staff travel for director and project manager at 34.5¢/mile X 100 miles/month X 12 months = $828. See www.gsa.gov/travel.htm for travel hints. ➡

Travel

Many organizations have established policies which allow reimbursement for various travel costs. This probably will apply to volunteers as well as paid staff, depending on the grant requirements. Finally, remember that consultants' travel should already be in their contract.

Bookkeeper's time to submit billings: 5 hours/month X $12/hr X 12 months = $720. ➡

Grant Administration

Some grants allow you to itemize administration expenses. This could include time for an accountant or bookkeeper, or time required by the project manager to complete grant related reports. Some organizations also include a specific percentage of overhead devoted to the project. Again, you should specifically check with the funder to see if these types of costs are allowed.

$900/month (rent, utilities, insurance, maintenance) X 12 months X 25% = $2,700. ➡

Indirect Costs

Indirect costs usually include "overhead" which is used to operate your organization. For example, this could include the cost to operate and maintain buildings, equipment, or general administrative salaries. Not all funders allow you to include indirect costs in your budget. When they do, they often identify what items can be included, or the maximum percentage of your operating expenses they will fund.

Steering Committee: 12 people X $15/hr X 4 hrs X 12 months = $8,640. ➡

In-Kind or Soft Match

"In-Kind" usually means services or products that are donated to the project. The actual value of an in-kind donation would be the same as if you purchased the service or item.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The growth of the Internet has been a mixed blessing for grant seekers. While it may be tempting to just sit at a computer and click, nothing can take the place of personal contact. Use the Internet as one more tool in your search for assistance. Just as using any other resource, you should carefully match the funder's objectives with your goals.

Below are some of the sites that have provided good basic information to begin your Internet search. Happy surfing!

NonProfit Gateway	www.nonprofit.gov
The Foundation Center	www.fdncenter.org
The Philanthropy Roundtable	www.philanthropyroundtable.org
The Grantsmanship Center	www.tgci.com/
Philanthropy Northwest	www.philanthropynw.org
U.S. State and Local Gateway	www.statelocal.gov/funding.html
The Council on Foundations	www.cof.org

TWELVE REASONS WHY PROPOSALS ARE TURNED DOWN

1. The proposal did not match objectives of the funding source.
2. The proposal is strong on idea, but lacks detail.
3. The objectives are too ambitious in scope and not clear how they can be implemented.
4. The proposal fails to strike the reviewers as significant.
5. The proposal is poorly written and hard to understand.
6. The reviewers do not know the capabilities of the applicants.
7. It is not clear who is going to benefit.
8. There is no evidence the key people involved have been contacted and have committed themselves.
9. The proposal fails to show the applicant is aware of what others are doing in the same area.
10. The budget is beyond the range of funding available from the funder.
11. The funds requested do not relate directly to the objectives.
12. The writer did not follow the format provided by the funder.

FINAL THOUGHTS
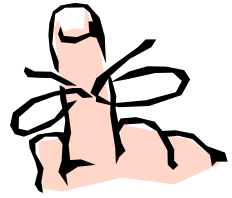
Review all application requirements before starting to write. If the grant announcement is a 100-page book, make a cup of hot chocolate, find a comfortable chair, and read it! The one basic rule to writing proposals is "follow the instructions."

Plan for community and citizen input before you develop the application.
This will build support for your project and eliminate any potential conflicts or duplication of effort.

Develop the project concept with a team, but have one person write the final application.

Answer every question in the order presented.

Don't try for perfection on your first draft. Get the ideas down first, then edit and rewrite.

Be specific. Don't hide a lack of knowledge or motives in a blizzard of nonessential information. Make sure all information in the proposal is easy to locate and read.

Have an associate or friend not directly involved in your project read the proposal. Look for:
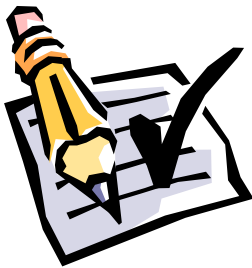
- Confusing terms or jargon.
- Unsupported arguments or unfounded assumptions.
- Weak documentation.
- Logical inconsistencies.
- Spelling and grammatical errors.
- Math errors.
- Budget items that aren't justified.
- Ways to improve the overall proposal impact.

Follow all instructions for assembling and submitting your application by the due date.